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ABSTRACT

This report presents nine steps, followed by work plans, for administrators when implementing a dropout prevention initiative. These nine steps are: (1) conduct a needs assessment to establish a database that identifies students who leave school early; (2) draft descriptors that identify elementary students who are at risk of dropping out later; (3) track and regularly evaluate identified high-risk students to provide a continuity of services as the students change schools; (4) develop an interagency referral system to provide outside services to potential dropouts; (5) develop a program for guidance and educational activities that directly involve needs of potential dropouts; (6) provide an alternative learning program for returning or potential dropouts; (7) provide a re-entry orientation program for returning dropouts; (8) provide training and development to task force members to increase sensitivity to needs of potential dropouts; and (9) inform all students about the effects of leaving school early and encourage effective student decision making. (CJH)

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DROPOUT PREVENTION INITIATIVE

WORKPLAN

FRANK L. MILLER*

1. Conduct a needs assessment that will establish a data base on students who leave school early in order to identify who is leaving early and why.

   PLAN: *Much of this data is already available to us in the form of the "Student Dropout Report" that is completed at each school on a monthly basis and submitted to Charleston (West Virginia Department of Education). Computer printouts are then provided to us on an annual basis. Find attached a copy of the report.*

2. Draft descriptors which identify elementary students who demonstrate behaviors that show a high risk of dropping out of school in later years.

   PLAN: *A group of educators in Taylor County were interviewed about behaviors they believed initiate the dropout trend (in elementary schools) and how these behaviors change in middle and high school. Included among this group were guidance counselors and teachers from elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as a teacher from the vocational center. There appeared to be a concensus with regard to the behaviors as well as the fact that a "potential dropout" could possess as few as one or any combination of behaviors listed below:*

   Absenteeism, poor academic achievement, school failure, poor coping skills, poor social achievement, lack of orientation towards a goal, poor attitude, lack of motivation, poor task completion, low self-esteem, family history of dropping out, low level of parental involvement, resistance to authority, referrals to principal for discipline, poor impulse control (fighting, calling out in class, etc.), kids who "hang out" outside of school prior to classes, use of tobacco products, history of abuse by parents, failure to participate in extra-curricular activities, and open admission of wanting to drop out at sixteen.

   This list of descriptors will be used to assist educators in identifying and working with this population and will be used on a referral form to help to develop a list of "high risk" students and identify their areas of need.

3. Create a method for tracking students identified as being in high risk of leaving school early in order to enable regular evaluation and intervention with identified students and assure continuity of services as a student changes schools within the district.

   PLAN: *At the elementary level guidance counselors and/or special education coordinators will maintain lists of high risk students. A referral system is already in place at every school where teachers with any number of concerns may refer a student to the School Based Assistance Team (SBAT). This team includes the principal, teacher, and special education*

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coordinator at a minimum, with any number of specialists available (speech and language therapists, learning disability specialists, guidance counselor, educable mentally impaired teachers, school psychologist, etc.). The primary function of this team is to develop remedial strategies for any students referred and to review the effect of these strategies within a prescribed time period. It is then empowered to develop action plans for those who require additional attention. With the descriptors listed above at their disposal, the team can also target students who are high risk for dropping out as well as those with suspected handicaps.

If a student moves within the district these records (SBAT notes) are to be sent to the next school, as when a student moves up to the next level (elementary to middle e.g.). Along with this file a list designating which students the SBAT has designated high risk for drop out will be included. A few weeks after the start of school in the fall or after the move occurs, the SBAT will review student progress. For students who change schools mid-semester it is common practice to call the receiving school to alert them as to the student's special needs (special education, reading lab). High risk for drop out will now be an added concern with prescribed action steps.

4. Develop an interagency referral system to provide outside services to potential dropout students and, thus, provide them with services not available through the school system.

PLAN: A letter will be sent out to contact persons in community agencies that serve this population or their families. Agencies to be targeted are listed below:

Magistrate courts, state police, sheriff's department, city police department, Department of Human Services, mental health clinic, Health Department, medical center, physicians, and Department of Vocation Rehabilitation.

The purpose of this letter will be to acquaint them with the services available through the school system, to encourage them to refer school-age clients to these programs, and to make them aware that we have identified our high risk students and are eager to learn what assistance may be available in their respective agencies. Follow-up phone calls will be made by the drop out coordinator and names of school level dropout prevention coordinators will be provided.

5. Write a program for and promote guidance and education activities to deal directly with the needs of potential dropouts and, thus, reduce the dropout risk by working with the child to overcome the reasons for dropping out.

PLAN: At this time a comprehensive guidance program has been developed in Taylor County. With the descriptors drafted and a high risk population identified, it is planned to tie in educational activities and materials with the learner outcomes to be developed in this plan. A county employee has been assigned the responsibility to develop this component. It is hoped that these new goals and objectives can be meshed with existing guidance programs that cover the following areas:

Interpersonal skills, study skills, social skills (peer relations, teacher/student relations), coping skills, family problem solving, achievement motivation, and health and safety.

Below are some of the existing programs that have been effective for other education purposes but will serve to combat the dropout rate as well. This plan will "tie in" to these existing programs and provide consultation services, positive incentives, educational materials, or whatever the task force feels will benefit these programs.

HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

Individual and group guidance activities, developmental guidance, career education programs (interpersonal skills at grade 7, orientation at grade 8, exploration at grade 9, vocational training at grade 10), remedial reading and math courses, exit interviews with all potential dropouts, phone contacts with dropouts to encourage them to return, clothing bank, shower facilities, hygiene supplies, pre-vocation project (Singer units with hands-on tasks, slide projector and taped instructions for drafting, masonry, production manufacturing, small engine repair, cooking/baking) - see attached.

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

TRY PROGRAM: "Teaching the Real You" - A development guidance/academically oriented program that is located in an off-campus facility (4-H Camp) that is ability grouped with self-paced, individualized instruction in all subjects not covered in the main building. Academic and affective domains are both targeted with both group and individual guidance. With these funds we hope to expand this program as well as provide it with materials and funds for their incentive program (industrial arts projects, field trips, etc.). Homework sheets (daily) and progress reports (weekly) are also used to organize studdents and open communication with parents. All high risk students would be targeted.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Foster grandparent program, peer tutoring, individual and group counseling, safety patrol, "student of the week," McDonald's special awards for perfect attendance (coupons for free meals, toys, and a $50 savings bond for the winner of a drawing). Again the plan is to allocate funds to supplement their incentive programs that are geared towards the high risk group.

6. Coordinate county efforts to develop an alternative learning program for adolescents through securing funds and developing a written program to give academically and behaviorally troubled high school students extra-curricular or out-of-school educational experiences that will enable them to re-enter school or complete a diploma through tutorials.

PLAN: *In an attempt to fulfill this goal efforts have been made to fund additional alternative education programs that target potential dropouts. One is through our tri-county vocational center in Clarksburg. Funds have been secured to build a facility that will serve as an alternative school. The United Career Center administrative council has proposed that the population to be served at this location will be potential dropouts, and they have included plans for this program in their LEA Guide for 1986-87. We hope to provide students for this program once it is ongoing and to participate in any training they provide for teachers and/or coordinators of dropout programs.*

Another program geared towards dropouts is one funded through our Regional Education Service Agency (RESA). They hope to provide a fulltime position and other educational equipment and materials. We hope to provide eligible students for the program as well as coordination efforts. Facilities are at the off-campus location used by the TRY Program mentioned earlier. There are presently two classrooms - one in use, one available for the KEEPS program which is geared to serve 40-45 students for a period of up to 200 clock hours each.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Middle School: After school clinics for "latch-key" kids who are considered high risk. Mini-clinics include volleyball, football, golf, fishing, aerobics, computers, slimnastics and basketball. Under this program we plan to provide sporting equipment for these clinics or arrange transportation for youngsters who would otherwise miss out on the clinics. An outdoor program based on a smaller version of "Outward Bound" takes kids on backpacking excursions. Survival skills, orienteering and the values of teamwork are essential components of this program. They are in need of supplies and equipment which could be provided for this target group participation.

7. Provide a reentry orientation program for returning dropouts to provide an orderly and supportive means of preparing students who have left school to return to the classroom in the least disruptive manner.

PLAN: *At this time Taylor County has several programs in effect that target this population. It is hoped to tie into these programs by providing information about alternatives available to these students, referring students to these programs, and to supplement them with additional educational materials, equipment, guest speakers, tuition assistance, transportation, etc. Listed below are brief descriptions of the various programs available:*

TUTORIAL PROGRAM

Tutors are available to students in specific subject areas--math, reading, and English--with the purpose of helping them graduate and gain a diploma instead of dropping out. Contracts have been set up with recent dropouts to help them to prepare for reentry to school. Other areas covered include basic skills, confidence maintenance, behavioral goals - coping skills. This service is free of charge, but we plan to provide incentives for those providing the tutoring.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Cost: Free Eligibility: Over age 16

Interest and Aptitude testing, reading and mathematics testing to determine ability and interests is provided. Instruction is individualized, and progress monitored by teacher-developed tests. Five areas are covered to help student dropouts pass the GED (math, science, social studies, English and reading).

JOB SKILLS

Topics covered: Generally how to get and keep a job, how to interview, appropriate dress, being on time, typical questions, social skills, work habits, filling out applications, writing letters. Employers from the community will be invited to address the students on what they look for in a potential employee. The dropout coordinator will arrange this by writing letters to businessmen in the community and following up with phone calls.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CLASSES

All students who have dropped out are referred to the various night classes offered (see attached course list); tuition assistance is available. The Dropout Program can help students not eligible for assistance.

The Dropout Program plans to provide other incentives to participants in these programs to include field trips (both recreational and job-related - visiting job sites e.g.), discount coupons from local merchants, tuition assistance, transportation, etc.

DROP OUT PREVENTION COURSE

This concept was developed with the idea of preventing dropouts in three groups:

all freshmen in high school (primary prevention);
high risk upper classmen (secondary prevention); and
those who already have dropped out (tertiary prevention).

The course would be presented prior to the start of each semester. It would be a requirement for incoming freshmen and a prerequisite for any dropout who wished to reenroll. It would be taught by a combination of staff members at the high school, each taking a section pertinent to their responsibilities. For example the principal could discuss the school philosophy and the discipline code; counselors might address dress and social skills; others could cover study skills, how to deal with frustration, how to develop a plan towards graduation, job opportunities in the community, etc. Returning students would have the opportunity to develop their schedule leading to graduation.

The dropout coordinator would serve to provide instructional materials, interactive software, guest speakers, radio and newspaper advertising about the course, videotapes, etc.

8. Provide training and development to task force members to increase the knowledge and sensitivity of members to potential dropouts and their needs.

   PLAN: *Plans include bringing in guest speakers from ongoïng dropout programs as well as individuals who have dropped out that have a perspective of the classroom a teacher may have missed. Opportunities will be provided for task force members to visit a successful alternate school or other dropout program so that they may bring back to the group some fresh ideas. Inservice will also be provided through Continuing Education (Professional Development for regular educators, Comprehensive System of Personnel Development for special educators). These workshops will be open to contact persons from the task force. They will be notified in advance of the dates of the sessions.*

9. Provide information to all students concerning the effects of leaving school early and to encourage more effective decision-making on the part of students.

PLAN: *To bring in former or current dropouts to address the students about what life in the "real world" is like. Learner outcomes will also be developed through the guidance program to impact upon all students. The dropout prevention task force will provide its descriptors, local data on dropouts, and educational material (videotapes, pamphlets, textbooks) regarding the benefits of staying in school.*